2:Musil S-4, 5 (no date)1928 MD4 Rwala MD4

CHAPTER XIII

OMENS

NATURAL PHENOMENA AS OMENS

The Bedouin does not think deeply on religious matters and follows no rules in his religious observances. Nevertheless, he guides himself in all his social and private undertakings by certain fixed customs, observes the various natural phenomena, and pays heed to internal impulses and dreams which he holds to be signs or warnings sent to him by spiritual beings who wish him either good or ill. He is a firm believer in the existence of spirits and thinks it absolutely necessary to do all that is agreeable and avoid what is disagreeable to them. Woe to him, if he should anger them! To do so would frustrate all his undertakings. And anger them he would, should he not be careful in his words and actions nor give due regard to days of portent and certain signs both visible and invisible.

When a Rwejli despatches a man on an affair of importance, he must not use the word *"Ruḥ,"* "Go!" or "Run!" He must not say: "Ride in the direction of the settlement of Baḳ'a" or "of the al-Lmât wells." All these words invite death. For the verb *râḥ, ruḥ*, is used in connection with death or departure from this world. *Baḳ'a'* signifies a violent death, and *al-lmât* also reminds one of destruction, or death. Therefore they are likely to say *"Erked"* for "Go!" or "Run," instead of *ruḥ* and to substitute for the topographical names Baḳ'a' or al-Lmât the term Ṭajjebt Ism, which, referring to a settlement or a well, means "the name is a good omen."

More important matters the Rwejli prefers to leave either till noon or at least till the dew has fully departed or to despatch them before the fresh dew has fallen. These times of the day he considers the most favorable, because the spirits are then resting. But there is no day without some meaning attached to it — it is either suitable for an undertaking or not. These significations are called *waǧba* or *waǧḥ*; the favorable ones being *zên*, the unfavorable *šên*. The best days on

2:Musil S-4, 5 (no date)1928 MD4 Rwala MD4

bân, must not be taken on a raid or war expedition, for her rider would come back without booty. 777

Should the raiders on their march against the enemy meet a flock of goats or sheep, they halt until the animals pass. If they rode through the flock, they would cause their own defeat, for the enemy would scatter them in the same manner as they had scattered the goats or sheep. Whoever sights a solitary white gazelle, *ẓebi*, must not mount his mare for some time, for she would stumble under him, *taḳanṭar* or *taḳanṭa'*, and he might hurt himself and thus meet with failure. A black dog, *mballam*, should be killed at sight, as the fiend is hidden in him and thus brings the Rwejli bad luck. The flesh of the wild swine which roam especially in the Sirḥân depression or, according to the Rwala, in al-Wâdi, is enjoyed by the Bedouins, who know nothing of permitted or forbidden food; pork fat they use in healing both wounded men and animals, but they hate to meet a wild swine when starting on a raid or on any other undertaking, because it brings bad luck. When a solitary raven or a *rḥama* vulture is seen flying above the raiders, they shoot at it, crying: "May Allâh destroy thee! *Sab'ek* (or *Sab'eč*)." They fear that if they did not kill the birds they would feast on the bodies of the fallen. If a raider's rein breaks, he should return at once. The commander of an expedition must also turn back if he seats himself on a saddle wet by rain. A broken rein means that the mare will run about freely after her rider has been thrown from the saddle, while a wet saddle reminds one of the commander's blood flowing down it. When a camel or a mare returns home stained with the blood of her slaughtered rider, she is generally sold to another clan or to the settlers, as the kin of the fallen man abhor riding an animal over which the blood of their kinsman has been spilled. 825 492 [262] [757] [761]

DREAMS AS OMENS

Much importance is attached by the Rwala to dreams. During sleep a man's soul moves among spiritual beings from whom it can learn all things hidden from men, whether of the past, of the present, or of the future. In most cases Allâh is appealed to by the Bedouins to send them dreams concerning their return from an important undertaking, *ḥelm m'âwdi*. Such dreams Allâh grants especially to the commanders of 787 721

2:Musil, S-4, 5 (no date)1928 MD4 Rwala MD4

hang the cradle, *rûğâḥa*, which is made of a quilted cover and has a rope tied to its four corners, high up to the tent poles. If, then, *as-sar'a* comes into the tent, she looks for the child on the beds made on the floor and takes no notice of the cradle hanging from above.

Another evil spirit appears in the shape of a big greyhound bitch, *seleḳa*, with an enormous jaw and a breastbone, *zowr*, reaching to the ground. This spirit, known as *sa'aluwwa*, is the only spirit which appears in the wide level desert and lives in dens such as are used by the hyenas. A traveler, *ṭurki*, a member of the Mseke kin which belongs to the 'Ebede division, once met what he thought to be a *seleḳa* in the desert. He made it come to him, believing that it might lead him to the camp it had left. But instead of being a *seleḳa*, it proved to be a *sa'aluwwa* who jumped at him, tore flesh from his breast and face, sucked his blood, and did not leave him till he was half dead. When finally found by other travelers, all he could do was to tell what had happened to him before departing this life, *râḥ*.

A *ḳurṭa* or *ḳârûz* is a spirit who destroys newly born boys but does his work unobserved. If a Rwejli is married to a woman who has borne him several boys all of whom have died after a short time, and if the same thing happens also with the second wife, then he knows for certain that it is a *ḳurṭa* who has done him this wrong. To appease the spirit he procures a cock with green feathers on its neck and waits until his wife comes to childbed again. When her time is near, with the live cock he draws in his tent seven circles, one within the other, kills the cock in the seventh in the center, buries it there, and lays his wife over that spot. She will then bear without any pain, and her son will not die, because the *ḳurṭa* has been given what belonged to it. *ḥakk al-ḳârûz*.

REVERENCE FOR GRAVES RARE AMONG BEDOUINS

The Bedouins know of no communion with the saints. In the whole inner desert there is not a single holy grave or shrine erected in honor of a saint. In fact they have no saints whatever. When they make their short sojourns in the settled territory, where by every village the dome of a shrine rises

2:Musil S-4, 5 (no date)1928 MD4 Rwala MD4

752
758
831

course, has not yet washed himself, and such an unclean one, *neǧes*, would make the wound still worse, *mustarfer*: The visitor salutes with the words: "May thy evil disappear! *jizûl šarrak*." Or: "May it disappear and not come over thee any more! *jizûl w-lâ jiǧîk*." To avoid informing the patient that he looks ill, and thus frightening him, the visitor says: "It seems to me thou hast a healthy color, perhaps nothing ails thee," the patient's reply usually being: "By Allâh himself, nothing is the matter with me, merely so and so."

[576]

761●
777

If the patient gets worse, nobody must mourn. "We have a soul, and he has a soul obeying Allâh. *ma'ana nesem w-ma'eh nesem taḥat allâh*." The patient gets worse every Wednesday and Friday, for these are the heavy days, *jowm aṭ-ṭakîl*, for him. Likewise every sixth, sixteenth, and twenty-first day of the lunar month aggravates the condition of the patient and spreads the news of his illness, *mubajjeh al-ḫabar*.

732

A demoniac is called *mharfal*. As such they consider the imbecile, the demented, and the insane. If he does not get well soon, he is fettered and allowed to perish of thirst.

752
758

If a mad dog, *čalb mṛalûṭ*, bites, *ji'azz*, a man, sulphur is applied to the wound, which is then burned with a red-hot nail. After forty days the injured person generally is stricken with rabies. Then they fetter him and throw hot ashes on his head until he dies.

752
755

In the case of a snake bite the soothsayer, *ḳarrâj*, is sent for and cures the bitten man with his spittle. The *ḳarrâj* learns this art from a member of the Rifâ'ijje Order at an-Nuḳra in the neighborhood of Damascus, paying one quarter of a *meǧîdijje* (22.5 cents) for tuition. No snake can harm a *ḳarrâj*.

Bites of scorpions and poisonous spiders are cured by wrapping the wounded limb in a raw skin or by laying the patient in an oblong pithole, the bottom of which is covered with camel manure thrown over camel urine, *'abas al-bel*. Then, covering the patient up to his head with clay or sand, they build a small fire at his side to make him sweat thoroughly. But to prevent him from falling asleep they shout at him: "O thou who has been bitten by an *'ankabût* spider, wilt thou live or wilt thou die?" He must answer: "I shall live, I shall live, not die."

763
429

A person seriously ill appoints a guardian for his young children with the words: "O So-and-So, I do not know what

2:Musil S-4, 5 (no date)1928 MD4 Rwala MD4

which they kill with the words: "O Allâh, this is the supper of our deceased." Or they take a small piece of bread and a bit of butter, throw and drop them into the fire, and say: "O Allâh, this belongs to our dead." 765

He who passes by the burial place of a person dear to him can do him much good if, taking a pebble from his grave, he says: "I take this in order to lighten the soul of So-and-So. May Allâh have mercy on him. *An-âḫeḏ hâḏa muḫaffefen 'an rûḥ flân allâh jarḥameh.*"

That which keeps life in both man and beast is called *nefes*, *nesem*, or *rûḥ*. The *nefes* (or *nesem*) of both the man and the animal is alike, *wâḥed*. Whether the *nesem* of an animal ever dies is known to Allâh alone, yet, in all probability, not even an animal will die completely but will go with the man either to paradise or to hell, because animals live merely for man. The *nefes*, *nesem*, or *rûḥ* are put into the man as well as into the animal by Allâh. As long as the child lies in its mother's womb, it has no *nefes*, but the moment its head comes out at birth, Allâh opens its nostrils, *jeftaḥ allâh ḫšûmeh* or *manâḫereh*, and puts the *nefes* into its body, *jeḍḫel an-nesem beh*. This *nesem* had never before been in any other living being, for Allâh creates an entirely new *nesem* in every case. 774 761

Mindîl al-Ḳaṭ'i told me that every living man has a soul, *nesem*. If there were no soul, he would not live. The soul cannot be seen but can be heard, being identical with the breath, *ar-rûḥ hiw an-nesem*. The soul of the first man was breathed by Allâh into the nostrils, hence the human soul originates from Allâh's breath. This original soul exists in human beings to this day, because Allâh not only did not take it away from them but is still augmenting it. When a child is born, it receives the *nesem* from its mother, to whom Allâh adds from his own breath every time she conceives. The *nesem* dwells in the man's inside, *bečabdeh wa-bṣadreh*. On the man's death the soul leaves his body through the nostrils, returns to Allâh, and waits till another mother conceives a man, *insi*, when Allâh will add the waiting soul to that of the mother. 774 775

As long as there is a *nesem* in the man, he lives *illi nesemeh beh ḥajj*, but when it leaves his body, he dies. The *nesem* departs through his nostrils, *jeṭla' min al-manḫar*. After his death the deceased is suspended in the air above his grave, head upwards. His *nesem* floats over his head. 775